

Rappahannock Christian Church – 1/16/11
Dr. Kenneth Wilbur

Communion Meditation

How wise is God, and how good God's plan!

I would not want to live the Christian life alone, in isolation. I know that in some places around the world people do. How hard that must be! But I wouldn't want to, and I'm grateful that I don't have to. I am a member of the Rappahannock Christian Church. We are together in Christ and no matter what differences we may have we are one in Him. This is, to some extent, what we celebrate here. It is what He has done for us both individually and also as a community of believers, and we come here to give Him our thanks. I will read you about this Table from Matthew's Gospel:

Matthew 26:26-29 – While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my body."

Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you. This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins. I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom."

Step Aside

We have as our Scripture this morning a passage from the first chapter of John's Gospel. Many, many Christians are reading and learning from this passage today because it is listed as today's Scripture in the Common Lectionary.

John 1:29-42 – The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world! This is the one I meant when I said, 'A man who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.' I myself did not know him, but the reason I came baptizing with water was that he might be revealed to Israel."

Then John gave this testimony: "I saw the Spirit come down from heaven as a dove and remain on him. And I myself did not know him, but the one who sent me to baptize with water told me, 'The man on whom you see the Spirit come down and remain is the one who will baptize with the Holy Spirit.' I have seen and I testify that this is God's Chosen One."

The next day John was there again with two of his disciples. When he saw Jesus passing by, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God!"

When the two disciples heard him say this, they followed Jesus. Turning around, Jesus saw them following and asked, "What do you want?" They said, "Rabbi" (which means "Teacher"), "where are you staying?"

"Come," he replied, "and you will see." So they went and saw where he was staying, and they spent that day with him. It was about four in the afternoon.

Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, was one of the two who heard what John had said and who had followed Jesus. The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter).

Well, those who put the Lectionary together are to be commended. This is not a random passage. It comes right after Christmas when we have just celebrated Christ's birth. Here we have Jesus' introduction onto the public scene by John the Baptist. John points to Jesus and says, "Look! Here is the Lamb of God. He is the One you've been looking for."

Surely, Jesus is the focus of this passage, but for a minute today I want to turn our attention to John. As he points to Jesus, John relinquishes the spotlight.

To let go of the spotlight...It's very hard to do!

John had been an important person. Over the short time of his ministry he had risen in prominence. The Elders in Jerusalem had even sent a team to him to inquire if he were the Messiah! Surely most of Israel had heard of him, and regarded him as a prophet --- like one of the prophets of old. And he is willingly stepping aside in favor of another? Amazing!

This is surely difficult to do. Few people do so gracefully. We certainly see this in our celebrities. Many exhibit bizarre -- often self destructive -- behavior when they are usurped in the limelight. Perhaps some of us have even gone through this experience ourselves. Here John willingly points to Jesus and says, "Not me! He's the One." In John's own words, recorded in John 3, he says, "He must increase, but I must decrease."

"He must increase, but I must decrease." How humble! How difficult! It seems to me that at the core of this is an attitude. It is an attitude of surrender to the will of God. We call this "servanthood."

I was talking with some planners of this year's Project Inasmuch this past week. We were talking about just this very thing. God is interested in our attitude! You should read Isaiah 1. Look at what he says there. "Look," God says through Isaiah, "Stop bringing your offerings to Me. I'm sick to death of your attitude. When you come to the temple, all you are doing is trampling my courts! It is detestable. It can't bear it anymore." As a minister, it would be very hard to say this kind of thing. If your attitude isn't right, don't bother to put your money in the offering plate??!! Wow! But that is what God tells Isaiah to say.

I think that it is easy to miss the fact that our motivation for doing what we do for God is often more important than *what* we do.

It was Paul who told the Corinthians that, “God loves a cheerful giver.” Jesus, you may recall, quotes Isaiah when he sees the hypocrisy of the Pharisees: “These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.” (Mark 7:6)

Paul came unglued about this. Jesus came unglued at it. Isaiah did. *God cares about our attitude!*

In the story that today’s passage tells, we see John the Baptist willingly step aside.

This is difficult in real life. Parents all have to face it at some time. We can do and do for our kids, but at some point it’s time to step back and let them make their own way. It’s a hard, hard thing to do. Sometimes we have to step back in the workplace, giving way to new people, new ideas, new technologies. Again, it can be really difficult to give over prominence and control.

Sometimes we experience this here in the church, too. I think it is very easy to forget that it is not you or me who are to be served here. It is not about what this or that “program” can do for us. Christ is the One whom we come to serve. We are not the focus. The purpose of the Church is to give us a place to serve God and others.

Sometimes we forget that the same rules do not apply in the Church as they do elsewhere. The ditch digger may have greater spiritual insight than the corporate executive. The one who puts the most money in the offering plate is not necessarily the one to whom we should turn for spiritual guidance, or even for church leadership. It is God who distributes gifts to the people, and we must carefully discern where those gifts are and how God expects us to use them.

Speaking of attitude, what happens when our efforts in the church are not fully appreciated? How do we react when our best, our highest is given, but our work is criticized? → “WELL! These people don't deserve what I have to offer...!!!”

Wait! You mean, like WE deserve God's grace?! We do NOT deserve it! Christ did not die for the godly, but for the ungodly!

It looks to me like John realized all this. He realized that he was only a tool in the hand of God. He did the job he was called to do, and he did it very well. He told people that Jesus was the One. “He must increase, and I must decrease.”

We honor John the Baptist, and look to him as an example of the attitude of servanthood that we should all have.

Benediction

Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. – Psalm 19:14